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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

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Wednesday, March 08, 2006

The Detroit News

'Family last' policy may have killed Ricky Jury will decide case on adoptive parents, but birth parents didn't do it

Another horrifying death of a child "known to the system" has started knees jerking all over Michigan. Instead of looking for real solutions, too many so-called child advocates are scapegoating efforts to keep families together, claiming the death was related to a so-called "families first" policy in Michigan.

In most cases, that's just wrong. But in the case of Ricky Holland, the claims are bizarre -- and dangerous.

The story of what happened to Ricky's first family proves the real policy in Michigan is families last -- and it was that policy that may have led to his death.

While it will be up to a jury to decide who killed Ricky Holland, we already know who didn't kill him: his birth parents. Ricky's mother's only "crimes" were to be homeless and jobless. So she asked the Department of Human Services to take Ricky temporarily.

Discriminating against poor

If Michigan really had a families first policy, the department would have said: "No. We don't tear children from loving mothers just because they're poor. We'll give you transitional housing, then help you find a permanent home and a job." (This would cost taxpayers less than warehousing Ricky and his siblings in foster care).

But the department did none of this. Then, when Ricky's mother couldn't succeed entirely on her own, a judge terminated her parental rights and the foster parents adopted the children.

To the extent that any policies may have played a role in Ricky's death, they are those that have dominated Michigan child welfare for a decade: Take the child and run as well as adoption at all costs.

If Michigan has a policy of families first, why does Michigan tear children from their families at a rate nearly 15 percent above the national average? Why is the rate of removal in Michigan more than 2.5 times the rate in Illinois -- yet in Illinois, independent court-appointed monitors found that as foster care plummeted, child safety improved and the child welfare system became a national model.

Abuse higher in foster care

Sadly, overlooking signs of abuse is not unusual when a child is in substitute care. The majority of foster and adoptive parents do the best they can for the children in their care; many are true heroes. But the rate of abuse in foster care is far higher than realized and than in the general population.

That's because when the abuse is in foster care, state agencies are, in effect, investigating themselves. That creates an enormous incentive to see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil and write no evil in the case file.

As for adoption, no state has been more fanatical about it than Michigan. Everyone knows the one way a child welfare agency gets good press is to get those adoption numbers up. Federal

bounties for every adoption above the previous year's total create another incentive for slipshod placements.

Holland not first tragedy

Ricky Holland is not the first such tragedy for Michigan. In 2002, after what news accounts say was a rushed adoption to allow the family to move from Michigan to Iowa, the adoptive father of Timothy Boss was convicted of tying Timothy to a chair, beating him with a paddle and then burying the body under the basement floor. The father also adopted three other children from the Michigan foster care system.

It's not just Michigan. Adopted foster children have been found starved in New Jersey and allegedly caged in Ohio.

Yet somehow, when Ricky Holland died, nobody blamed foster care or adoption. They blamed the one approach not involved in the case -- family preservation. That's dangerous because it encourages a foster-care panic. Case workers terrified about being on the front page after the next tragedy will rush to tear away even more children.

Misdiagnosis will create panic

That will further overload workers. They'll have less time to investigate any case thoroughly and they'll actually be more likely to overlook children in real danger. So more children will die.

Though Michigan doesn't have a policy of families first, it does have a program by that name, a program that has kept together thousands of families the Department of Human Services was ready to tear apart. And because most parents who lose children to foster care are like Ricky's real mom -- overwhelmed and impoverished, not brutal -- the program has done it with a far better track record for safety than foster care.

Indeed, had Ricky Holland's case worker called Families First when his real mother first came to them and said "I'm homeless and jobless," Ricky almost certainly would be alive today. Yet the program constantly faces political attack and budget cuts, even as other states expand family preservation and make children safer.

Ricky Holland didn't die because of a families first policy. But he may have died for lack of one.

Richard Wexler is executive director of the National Coalition for Child Protection Reform in Alexandria, Va. Send e-mail to letters@detnews.com.

Foster care abuse

About 32.8 percent of 479 foster care alumni in Oregon and Washington reported some form of maltreatment by a foster parent or other adult in the foster home when they were children, according to a Casey Family Programs study in 2005.

A child is nearly twice as likely to die of abuse in foster care as in the general population, according to 2002 U.S. Health and Human Services data .

Source: National Coalition for Child Protection Reform

Former neighbor describes mother's sadness after death of child

Wednesday, March 08, 2006

By JERRY NUNN
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Among those is Jane Smith, a social worker with Child Protective Services. Now retired, Smith was officially assigned to the family after the child's death.

Smith said, following Monique's death, law enforcement and other officials felt Donna Yost killed her daughter.

"Was that your feeling, too?" asked defense attorney Edward M. Czuprynski.

"Yes," said Smith.

Donna Yost had two other minor children at the time of Monique's death who were eventually removed from the home and placed with relatives. Smith said she is unsure when that occurred. Those youngsters were not seen as "being in harm's way," Smith testified.

"With no cause of death, they had no reason to remove the other children," she said.

Smith focused on a meeting scheduled for the day following Monique's death at which police and social workers planned to question Monique about allegations of sexual abuse.

That meeting was scheduled weeks in advance, but Czuprynski argues the date was never confirmed with Donna Yost; that she was unaware it was even scheduled.

Still, Smith named the meeting and the allegations of sexual abuse as possible motives.

"Donna was afraid of losing all her children if the information of sexual abuse came out," said Smith, noting the family would have lost state and federal benefits it received.

Michael Dedge remembered the day with chilling clarity. He recalled the distressed voice of Donna Yost as she attempted to awaken her 7-year-old daughter: "Wake up, Monique. You need to wake up."

But Monique Yost, victim of a drug overdose, never did.

Dedge, a friend and former neighbor of Donna Yost, administered CPR. Someone called 911.

That was Oct. 10, 1999. Today, Yost, the child's mother, stands accused of murder in Bay County Circuit Court. If convicted she faces up to life in prison. Testimony in the trial began last week in the court room of Judge William J. Caprathe.

Today, Dedge still recalls the seizure that gripped the child's lifeless body.

Her skin was an off-color; her lips a grayish-blue, Dedge told the court.

His attempts to revive the little girl failed.

"Her eyes were open, but cloudy," Dedge said. "She gurgled a little and started to breathe real slow."

Dedge testified to the sadness Donna Yost suffered in the days and weeks following the young girl's death.

Other witnesses have testified Yost "turned her emotions on and off" or described the mother as having no emotion at all.

Tuesday's court proceedings got off to a late start.

Prior to witness testimony Caprathe ruled against a 16-point motion for mistrial filed by Czuprynski.

Asked in the motion to recuse himself, declare a mistrial and discharge the jury, Caprathe said he had "no predisposition in the case," despite rulings he made in early hearings involving Yost.

By the end of the day, two other prosecution witnesses had taken the stand - Amy Laisure and Angela Schenck who were former cell-mates of Donna Yost during her 1999 incarceration in the Bay County jail.

Yost was released from jail shortly thereafter and has since been free on her own recognizance.

Laisure and Schenck gave statements to authorities regarding the Yost murder case in 2004, about five years after their initial contact with Yost.

Schenck said Tuesday that she heard several versions of the circumstances surrounding Monique's death.

"I found it odd that a mother who had just lost her child never shed a tear. There was no emotion; no remorse," Schenck testified.

Both Schenck and Laisure said they did not offer their statements in 2004 but, rather, detectives approached them.

Holding a copy of the 2004 interview transcripts before Laisure, Czuprynski asked: "When did you last read this through?"

"This morning," Laisure said.

Czuprynski then noted the lapsed time from when the witnesses met Yost to when they gave their statements to authorities.

"I was young," said Laisure. "Those things bothered me and they stuck in my mind."

- Jerry Nunn is a staff writer for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9647 or by e-mail at jnunn@bc-times.com.

Macomb County

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Macomb County

Detroit Free Press

March 8, 2006

MT. CLEMENS: A high school teacher is charged in online sex case

A Mt. Clemens High School teacher was arraigned Monday on charges that he tried to meet with a person whom he believed was a 13-year-old girl for sex in Novi, according to Attorney General Mike Cox.

Agents from the Attorney General's office arrested Louis A. Pressel, 43, on Sunday as he arrived for what they say was a sexual encounter he arranged online.

Investigators say Pressel started chatting online Jan. 11 with someone he thought was a girl. The operation was part of Cox's Child and Public Protection Unit, which, according to Cox's office, has now caught 83 people.

"Parents have plenty to worry about," Cox said in a statement. "The last thing they should have to fear is that their child's teacher is an Internet sexual predator."

Pressel was arraigned in 54-1 District Court in Novi before Magistrate Judith Holtz on charges of child sexually abusive activity and using the Internet to communicate with a minor to commit child sexually abusive activity. Each charge carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Bond was set at \$300,000.

A preliminary exam is scheduled for March 15. The Attorney General's Office was notified that Pressel was hiring an attorney.

TC Wallace, superintendent of Mt. Clemens Public Schools, said Tuesday that Pressel taught chemistry to 11th- and 12th-graders at the high school and has been at the school for eight years. He said Pressel is on paid administrative leave pending further investigation and that the teacher has had no prior problems in his tenure at the high school.

"What is most important is that we protect the integrity of our programs and ensure parents that schools are safe," Wallace said. "We also don't want students to lose focus as a result of an unfortunate incident as this."

*By Christy Arboscello
and Stan Donaldson*

Teacher allegedly pursued sex with teen girl

Mount Clemens man charged as Internet predator

PUBLISHED: March 8, 2006

By Frank DeFrank
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A 43-year-old Mount Clemens High School science teacher is accused of using the Internet to try to solicit a minor for sex.

Louis Aaron Pressell of Troy is charged with one count of child sexually abusive activity and a second felony for using the Internet to facilitate the sex crime. Each offense carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison upon conviction.

Magistrate Judith Holtz of Novi's 52-1 District Court set bond at \$300,000 and ordered Pressell to return March 15 for a pretrial conference. Pressell requested a court-appointed attorney, court officials said.

Mount Clemens Community Schools officials placed Pressell on leave when they learned of the charges. He will continue to receive his salary while the criminal investigation continues.

"The school district's greatest concern is to ensure that our students and our parents are the recipients of a safe and effective environment for learning," T.C. Wallace, school superintendent, said in a prepared statement.

"The safety of our students and the integrity of our educational program are of the utmost importance to us and to those we serve."

Pressell is accused of "chatting" on the Internet between Jan. 11 and March 5 with a person he believed to be a 13-year-old girl. The communication culminated Sunday with an agreement between the two to meet in Novi for sex.

But the "girl" turned out to be a member of state Attorney General Mike Cox's Child and Public Protection Unit, a special task force established to apprehend child predators who use the Internet to solicit minors.

"Parents have plenty to worry about," Cox said in a news release announcing Pressell's arrest.

"The last thing they should have to fear is that their child's teacher is an Internet sexual predator." A Cox spokesman said investigators have uncovered no evidence to suggest Pressell targeted any Mount Clemens students.

Pressell came to work in Mount Clemens in 1997, school officials said. His current assignments include teaching 11th- and 12th-grade chemistry.

Wallace said school officials will look for a certified science teacher to replace Pressell "so we can maintain the continuity."

Teacher Faces Internet Sexual Predator Charges

Man Held On Bond

POSTED: 2:16 pm EST March 7, 2006

A Mount Clemens High School teacher is facing felony criminal charges of using the Internet to arrange for sex with a minor.

Authorities content that from Jan. 11 to March 5, Louis Aaron Pressell, 43, had Internet conversations with someone he believed to be a 13-year-old girl. When Pressell arranged a meeting in Novi on March 5, he was arrested by attorney general investigators, according to the Attorney General's Office.

"Parents have plenty to worry about," said Attorney General Mike Cox. "The last thing they should have to fear is that their child's teacher is an Internet sexual predator."

Pressell was arraigned March 6 at the 54-1 District Court in Novi on one count of child sexually abusive activity, a 20-year felony, and one count of using the Internet to communicate with a minor to commit child sexually abusive activity, also a 20-year felony.

Pressell is being held on a \$300,000 bond, and will appear in court for a pre-exam conference on March 15, according to the Attorney General's Office.

"My office will continue to track down those who seek to harm Michigan's children, and bring them to justice," said Cox.

For more information and tips on safe Internet usage for children, go to www.Michigan.gov/ag.

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Bond reduced for B.C. man charged in computer-sex case

Trace Christenson

The Battle Creek Enquirer

Bond was reduced Tuesday for a Battle Creek man charged with using a computer to solicit sex with a teen.

But Brian Woodman, 32, remains in the Calhoun County jail after his preliminary examination in District Court was postponed Tuesday.

Woodman was arrested Feb. 22 after Emmett Township Department of Public Safety officers said he suggested sex in an online chat with a person posing as a 14-year-old girl. He was actually corresponding with Emmett Township Officer Seth Graves.

Woodman is charged with eight counts of using a computer to solicit minors for immoral purposes and if convicted, faces up to 30 years in prison.

But in court Tuesday, Defense Attorney Michael Roth likened the incident to phone sex.

"It was computer sex," Roth said. "I don't believe it was dangerous. He was not a threat to any individual. They were separated by miles and it was done by wire."

Roth said his client "doesn't have a reputation of being dangerous."

But Assistant Calhoun County Prosecutor Sarah Soules argued to District Judge John Holmes against a lowered bond because, she said, Woodman thought he was communicating with a 14-year-old girl.

Police said they created a profile of a young teenager after Woodman allegedly contacted a 16-year-old female student at Harper Creek High School through MySpace.com, a Web site used by teens to send messages and pictures to each other.

Police have alleged that Woodman wrote to the girl depicted in the profile for more than a week and then suggested they meet at Kimball Pines Park and have sex. He was arrested when he arrived at the park.

"He communicated with a person he believed to be a 14-year-old girl," Soules said, "and arranged to meet to have sex."

Soules told Holmes that Woodman was investigated in 1995 about allegations that he was, at age 22, having sex with a 15-year-old girl, although he was not charged.

"In that case he had arranged to meet the girl at Kimball Pines Park," Soules said, noting a comparison to the new allegations.

But Roth argued his client was not charged in that case and that he was only communicating with a police officer in the recent case.

"That will become important because the police officer instigated the communication," Roth said.

Holmes said he would allow Woodman to put up 10 percent, or \$10,000, of the \$100,000 bond instead of the full amount before he can be released.

Roth asked for a delay in the preliminary examination because he said he did not have time to review the police reports. A new date was not immediately set.

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

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Senate votes to give schools more time to release criminal list

3/7/2006, 6:39 p.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT *The Associated Press*

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — School districts would have more time to verify information before releasing the names of workers with criminal records under legislation approved unanimously Tuesday by the Michigan Senate.

Despite opposition from critics, the Senate also required that the names only of employees who have committed felonies or certain misdemeanors involving sex or violence be made available to the public — not those convicted of other misdemeanors.

"Misdemeanors should go away with age," said Sen. Ron Jelinek, a Three Oaks Republican. "We don't want irrelevant, old misdemeanors."

The legislation was prompted by problems involving a new law that requires the state Department of Education to check the criminal histories of more than 200,000 school employees twice a year.

The initial list sent to schools in early February was inaccurate, leading to lawsuits from teachers' unions that said mistakes could harm innocent workers. State law requires the immediate firing of sex offenders, and past felons can keep their jobs only if OK'd by local superintendents and school boards.

In response to accuracy concerns, the House recently passed legislation giving schools 14 days to verify their employees had committed the crimes listed.

But the Senate changed the bill Tuesday to allow school officials more time — exempting the list of convicted employees from Freedom of Information Act requests for 15 business days, extending the extra time for review from two weeks to three.

Public bodies already have five business days to answer a FOIA request and can extend the response time for 10 more business days. The Senate-approved bill essentially gives districts up to 30 business days — six weeks — before they would have to release the names of employees with criminal records.

The bill now heads back to the House and could end up in a House-Senate conference committee.

Before the Senate vote, lawmakers debated just what crimes should be included on the list.

Sen. Alan Cropsey, a DeWitt Republican, said school boards should have information about all criminal convictions and then decide whether to notify the public about misdemeanors that aren't fireable offenses.

Misdemeanor drunk driving offenses could be important to know if school personnel are driving children to extracurricular events, he said.

Michigan Press Association officials later voiced similar concerns.

But Sen. Michael Switalski, a Roseville Democrat, said it's better to have a "bright line" now and consider adding other misdemeanors to the list in the future.

"The wise thing would be to move slowly, properly and to protect the rights of the innocent," he said.

While the legislation doesn't specifically require names to be released, lawmakers are confident that courts will rule the list should be made public.

The state is working to send schools a more accurate list later this month. In the first go-around, some of the people wrongly listed may have matched people with similar names and others might have been victims of stolen Social Security numbers, officials said.

The FOIA bill is House Bill 5675.

Senate Changes Employee Offender List

The Senate made several changes today to a bill that would revise the school employee list before unanimously passing it out of the chamber.

The changes were to HB 5675, sponsored by Rep. Rick **BAXTER** (R-Concord), a bill that would require the Michigan Department of State Police (MDSP) and the Department of Education (MDE) to ensure that the list of school personnel criminal convictions are accurate before being released to schools and the public.

The first amendment was offered by Sen. Ron **JELINEK** (R-Three Oaks) and would make certain misdemeanor convictions subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), rather than allowing all misdemeanor convictions to be subject to FOIA requests.

According to the amendment, the district would still get the full list of misdemeanors but could decide if certain misdemeanors, such as minor in possession, needed to be attached to names rather than being vaguely listed as in, "three employees have misdemeanor offenses," Jelinek said.

Before the amendment passed, all convictions were subject to FOIA requests. Those in favor of the amendment argued that it would still follow FOIA guidelines but would also protect the rights of teachers in the school system.

"The amendment gives the public the right to know if the employee is convicted of an offense that would affect their child but also protects the employee's privacy," said Sen. Alan **CROPSEY** (R-DeWitt).

Those opposed to the amendment argued that even though the minor convictions that wouldn't be subject to FOIA won't necessarily put the children at risk, it allows the MDSP and the MDE to "scrub" the list, which wasn't the intention of the original bill.

"It has to be public information if it means the person is subject to being fired," said Sen. Patty **BIRKHOLZ** (R-Saugatuck Twp.). "FOIA requires full disclosure and that should be open."

Birkholz was one of five who opposed the amendment. Sens. Tony **STAMAS** (R-Midland), Laura **TOY** (R-Livonia), Bev. **HAMMERSTROM** (R-Temperance) and Gerald **VAN WOERKOM** (R-Norton Shores) also voted against the amendment.

This amendment caused some commotion on the floor. Before session Republicans caucused for a few hours about the bill and potential amendments. When Jelinek's amendment was up for a vote, no one discussed the amendment. Hammerstrom had to call for a recount because many people thought they were preparing to vote for a different amendment.

"This turned into a much larger hornets' nest than we ever expected," Birkholz said about the bill.

Jelinek offered another amendment that would prevent retired or former employees from ending up on the list. Apparently the list has been tossing out names of people who no longer work with school district. This bill passed unanimously.

Sen. Mike **BISHOP** introduced a bill that would make the list exempt from FOIA for 15 business days. Baxter's bill would allow the exemption for 14 days including non-business days. Bishop's amendment passed unanimously.

Sen. Mickey **SWITALSKI** (D-Roseville) offered an amendment that would exclude certain misdemeanors from making the list. According to the Switalski amendment, the state would only disclose offenses listed in the Michigan Revised School Code, which includes misdemeanors involving physical or sexual abuse or any felony.

Many who supported Jelinek's amendment drew the line at Switalski's amendment because they felt it included too many exemptions.

"There's so many misdemeanors (on the list) that it becomes very difficult to sort and chose which misdemeanors to use," Cropsey said.

Instead, the Legislature should stick to Jelinek's amendment because it excluded fewer misdemeanors.

For example, according to Jelinek's amendment, the school district could determine if a drunk driving conviction, which happened years and years ago, was pertinent to the list, Cropsey said. Under Switalski's amendment, the district wouldn't have a choice about whether the conviction was pertinent because it wouldn't make the list.

Switalski said that if someone had a drunk driving conviction that was pertinent, he or she wouldn't have a license and that their job would already be in jeopardy because the school would have already known about it.

That reasoning isn't necessarily true and schools should be able to look at the misdemeanors on a case-by-case basis to determine if the name needs to be released, Cropsey said.

This amendment passed 20-14 but the bill as a whole passed unanimously. The bill will go back to the House.

New Sex Offender Legislation Is Preliminary

The Senate Judiciary Committee is just beginning to work on a bill that would require judges to sentence some first-degree sex offenders to life in jail without parole.

The three-bill package would require a lifetime sentence without parole under certain circumstances. Among other provisions, a 17-year-old would be eligible for the sentence if he or she victimized someone between the ages of 13 and 16, used coercion to penetrate the victim, was armed with a weapon or something the victim believed to be a weapon, caused injury to the person or violated a mentally incapable person.

These circumstances would apply to a person older than 17 who was convicted of criminal sexual conduct. An older person could also be convicted to life in prison if the victim was younger than 13.

"I happen to think we should have the death penalty for these kinds of offender but if this is the best we can do, than so be it," said Sen. Mike **BISHOP** (R-Rochester).

Both Democrats and Republicans expressed need for legislation to crack down on sex offenders but were unsure about exactly what to do with such a broad bill.

Alpena County Prosecutor Dennis **GRENKOWICZ** said that as written, the bills would increase public safety and get dangerous pedophiles and repeat sex offenders off the street.

Grenkowitz began his testimony by differentiating between sexual exploiters, which he defined as those who know what they're doing is wrong and are not likely to be a repeat offender and sexual predators, who he defined as people who don't understand that what they're doing is wrong, don't feel any remorse and spend their lives victimizing multiple people.

"Predators simply must be isolated from society, warehoused if you will, so they won't hurt others," Grenkowitz said.

Children who are sexually offended often repeat what they learn, he said. Stopping these people before they have a chance to strike again would help break the cycle sex offenders create, he said.

Sen. Liz **BRATER** (D-Ann Arbor) wanted to know exactly how this bill would deter convicted sex offenders or their victims, from repeating the cycle.

Grenkowitz back-tracked and said by deter, he meant the criminals wouldn't be allowed back into society, not that the bill would necessarily deter them from striking in the first place.

Brater asked if anyone had knowledge about whether treatment programs were effective in helping these people.

"There have been programs but frankly, they haven't been that successful," said Sen. Tony **STAMAS** (R-Midland).

"The reality is that at some point we have to say we're going to break this cycle," he said.

Brater wanted to hear testimony from experts on the effectiveness of treatment programs.

Barb **LEVINE** with the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS) said the legislation isn't needed for several reasons. First, a person convicted of a first-degree sexual felony can already be convicted to life.

"Sentencing guidelines are designed specifically to allow judges to distinguish among offenses and offenders," she said. "We should allow them to continue to serve their purpose."

Levine also argued that sex offenders rarely repeat their crime and shouldn't necessarily be locked up for life. She presented the committee with a fact taken from a 2003 Justice Department study that showed 5.1 percent of child molesters with victims younger than 16, were rearrested.

Levine's last point was that the bill would make it impossible for those who are convicted of sex crimes to take advantage of advances in sex abuse treatment in the future because they wouldn't be released from prison.

Sen. Allen **CROPSEY** (R-DeWitt) asked Levine if she would support the bill if it differentiated between exploiter and predator, increased the age from 17 to 21 or was based on some kind of intermittent sentence where the person was eligible for life without parole on his or her second or subsequent offenses.

Levine said she'd be more open to those changes but wouldn't necessarily support the bill. Cropsey made it clear that he wasn't necessarily suggesting those changes, but just wanted her opinion.

These bills need to be changed in some manner and will be worked on, Cropsey said. Cropsey doesn't see the bills coming before the committee again for at least two weeks.

The package includes SB 0709, sponsored by Stamas, SB 0717, sponsored by Sen. Laura **TOY** (R-Livonia) and SB 0718, sponsored by Sen. Jud **GILBERT**.

Mar 8, 9:27 AM EST

Convict provides new leads in 30-year-old child killings

OAK PARK, Mich. (AP) -- Investigators are hoping information from a man convicted this week in a suburban Detroit murder case will lead them to the killer of four Oakland County children in the 1970s.

Richard Lawson, 60, who was found guilty Tuesday of a 1989 murder in Livonia, recently has given police information in the "Oakland County Child Killer" cases, State Police Detective Sgt. Garry Gray, who is leading the investigation, said Wednesday. Gray called Lawson a "person of interest" whose information has led investigators to Detroit's Cass Avenue corridor, which he described as a skid row with rampant prostitution and pornography at the time of the killings.

"We have some good, solid leads, good solid information. Lawson's a part of that process," said Gray, who would not provide more details.

Gray said Lawson has talked at length with investigators about the killings.

He said no break in the case is imminent. "We've got our hopes up. We've got things that I, of course, can't discuss," Gray said.

Lawson was found guilty of first-degree murder and armed robbery in Wayne County Circuit Court in the death of Livonia businessman Exavor Giller, a cab company owner who was shot and killed outside his home. He will be sentenced March 21.

A message seeking comment from Lawson was left Wednesday with his social worker at the Wayne County Jail.

Former Detroit Police Chief Isaiah McKinnon said Lawson was a paid informant for police in the 1970s and gave officers information about child molesters.

The child deaths horrified the Detroit area starting in 1976, with parents keeping their children in sight at all times. All the children were abducted from business areas in suburban Oakland County.

Eleven-year-old Timothy King, 12-year-old Mark Stebbins, 12-year-old Jill Robinson and 10-year-old Kristine Mihelich were suffocated between February 1976 and March 1977. Their bodies were found after each went missing for periods ranging from three to 19 days. Two had been raped, and one also was shot in the face with a shotgun.

Through the years, a series of strong leads has developed, but so far none has resulted in an arrest.

Leadership on health care welcome

State Medical Society's ideas should bring improvement

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Wednesday, March 08, 2006

The state's health care delivery system has been ailing for years, but its prognosis may be improving now that the Michigan State Medical Society has stepped in to provide some leadership.

The society recently rolled out a plan based on four principles - wellness, value, quality and universal coverage - but it won't be easy to implement without a broad buy-in.

To that end, the group has put together a coalition that includes the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, labor and the state surgeon general. The group sought out the opinions of patients, health care workers, employers, insurance companies and lawmakers in coming up with ways to improve the system.

Suggestions ranged from controlling costs and streamlining insurance rules, to expanding the use of electronic records. Two-thirds of those who responded to a society survey pointed to the need for universal health care coverage, but personal responsibility was touted, as well as the need for insurers to cover regular checkups and wellness care.

The plan is ambitious and will take years to realize. It can be hoped that along the way the government will step in to do its part. In the meantime, success will depend largely on the society's willingness to stick with it through the inevitable patches of inertia that accompany any sweeping reform. It has the clout and expertise to get the ball rolling, and we are hopeful that the resulting momentum will lead to an improved system.

The Flint Journal

Cox targets 3 Metron homes

Wednesday, March 08, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

LANSING -- After charging eight nursing home workers in connection with the death of a patient, Attorney General Mike Cox has filed suit against the parent company, Metron Integrated Health Systems, and its nursing homes in Allegan, Big Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Cox filed the lawsuit in Ingham County Circuit Court to recoup Medicaid funds used for "deficient care," he said in a statement.

He asked for an injunction he said would improve operations and bring the three nursing homes into compliance with state and federal laws.

Metron officials declined to comment this morning.

Cox has filed criminal charges, ranging from involuntary manslaughter to accessory after the fact, against workers at the Big Rapids center in the Jan. 16, 2005, death of Sarah Comer, 50. She was dependent on oxygen, but the nursing home allowed her oxygen tank to run empty, authorities say.

While some were accused of negligence in her death, others were accused of covering up the cause of death.

Cox said Metron's nursing homes in Allegan, Big Rapids and Kalamazoo endangered residents. He said the state Department of Community Health conducts annual evaluations, which showed higher-than-normal deficiencies. In Big Rapids, inspectors issued 27 deficiency violations in 2004, and 12 last year. Allegan jumped from five violations in 2004 to 21 in 2005, while Kalamazoo increased from eight in 2004 to 15 last year, Cox said.

Cox said Metron facilities received more than \$32 million from the state Medicaid program last year.

The Cascade Township-based Metron Integrated Health Systems has nine nursing homes in West Michigan.

Unionized care for elderly may backfire

Remember the legislation backed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm that would give unionized homes for the elderly preferential treatment under state law? Well, there was a backlash in the state Legislature, and a move is under way to send the governor a bill that would bar any such thing. Organized labor should love Granholm's proposal, which comes as her re-election campaign looms. Get it?

Nick Ciaramitaro, head of the AFSMCE, a state public employee union, conceded in legislative testimony that unionization of a care facility would be "evidence" that it complied with the proposed new state law. So the opposite obviously also would be true.

During the hearings, Rep. Robert Gosselin, a Troy Republican, asked what would happen to the elderly in question if the unionized workers went on strike? Ciaramitaro responded by saying only that there is heavy turnover on such staffs now.

The governor may be sorry she's become a party to such blatant pandering to a special-interest bill at election time.

Of course she always could do the right thing and drop the attempt to hand a large group of Michigan employers to a labor union.

OAKLAND PRESS EDITORIAL

March 7, 2006

MSU researchers developing and studying background check system for care of state's most vulnerable patients

Contact: Lori Post, College of Communication Arts and Sciences: lapost@msu.edu, (517) 355-3410 or Kirsten Khire, Communication Arts and Sciences: khirek@msu.edu, (517) 355-3410

3/7/2006

EAST LANSING, Mich. – The first phase of a statewide background check system developed by Michigan State University will go live April 1, allowing employers to better screen potential employees who work with patients in long-term care settings.

Last year, the state received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for \$5 million – with \$4.1 million going to MSU – to develop and study a three-phase comprehensive system to improve background checks in facilities such as nursing homes, hospices and assisted living centers.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm recently signed legislation she called for last year to strengthen criminal background checks in long-term care settings. This legislation is one of the requirements in the funding to Michigan as a pilot state to develop and study improvements to the system. The state needed laws requiring background checks on those providing direct care to individuals receiving long-term care.

"We must do all that we can to protect our state's most vulnerable citizens in long-term care facilities," Granholm said. "I am grateful to the efforts of Michigan State University in developing a background check system to ensure that people who shouldn't have access to our loved ones don't."

After many months of development, the first phase of the system will soon be up and running, said Lori Post, assistant dean for research in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences, who is in charge of developing the system. Expanded features will be in place this spring and fall for the second and third phases.

According to Post, employers will be able to expand background checks to include all prospective employees with direct access to vulnerable populations in a wider variety of health care settings. The new law requires that the background check be conducted prior to an individual's permanent employment.

As an expert in public health research technology, she will be evaluating the system's overall impact and that of the recently passed legislation.

"Michigan will be able to scientifically determine if the new process is effective in reducing crimes against vulnerable populations. The research focus allows us to test impact and to better evaluate the results of the background check system," Post said.

One of the first steps to evaluate the impact was to determine the percentage of Michigan households with a family member in long-term care. Through a recent phone survey, Post and other researchers determined that 6 percent of Michigan households fell into that category.

"This legislation will be a great help to our senior population. At the same time, federal support

enables us to develop an enhanced process that is both efficient and effective,” said Post. Sarah Swierenga, director of MSU’s Usability & Accessibility Center, is testing the system, and James Oehmke, professor in the Department of Agricultural Economics, is looking at its labor force implications.

“One of the research-related goals for the project is to ensure that the new background check process and the technologies built to support it are effective and efficient. We want to design a useful tool for health care workers and background check analysts,” Swierenga said.

Michigan will incorporate most types of providers into its background-check pilot project, including skilled nursing facilities, long-term care hospitals, hospitals with swing beds, intermediate care facilities for persons with mental retardation, home health agencies, residential care and assisted living facilities, and hospices.

In addition to the Michigan Department of Community Health, partners involved in the research project include the Michigan Department of Human Services, Michigan State Police and various units at MSU.

<http://ur.msu.edu/http://ur.msu.edu/>

Letters to the editor

FROM OUR READERS: Lives depend on Medicaid funds

March 8, 2006

With the media focusing extensively on issues such as port security, the health security of Americans receives less attention. Our health security, however, is at risk.

Congress recently passed legislation inviting states to cut billions of Medicaid dollars. Those cuts fall on the most vulnerable, people whose lives have been changed by grave accident, chronic illness or aging. Now, just weeks later, the president has proposed more Medicaid cuts.

It's not as if Medicaid is ineffective. It's the lifeline enabling millions of people with mental illnesses to improve their quality of life. Yet the recent cuts come at a time when we need greater federal investment in health security, not less.

National and Michigan commissions on mental health have advised making it a higher priority.

Failing to do so has dire results, including loss of life and increased business, societal and taxpayer costs. Mental health problems yield 30,000 suicides annually and take a serious toll on returning veterans. Children are among the most vulnerable.

William Tennant

Associate Director of Program

*Mental Health Association in Michigan
Southfield*

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Macomb County

March 8, 2006

Detroit Free Press

COUNTY-WIDE: More beds proposed for juvenile justice center

Commissioners will consider a proposal to add 25 beds to the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center in Mt. Clemens.

Designed to offset the costs of sending juveniles to centers outside the county, the \$1.3-million project would include the hiring of 14 youth specialists, two shift supervisors and two contractual therapists.

The Justice and Public Safety Committee is set to meet Monday to discuss the proposal.

The center has 80 beds.

By Steve Neavling

Probate court: Delinquency rates down

Kelly Nankervis, Midland Daily News

03/07/2006

Delinquency rates at the Midland County Probate Court have continued to drop, while more and more Midlanders came together in 2005 to help court wards be accountable and independent. The 2005 annual report recently was released, highlighting programs such as Midland Mentors and Midland Kids First. Both work to support kids by keeping them out of trouble with the help of Midlanders involved in education, social services and religious organizations.

In 2005, 673 offenses were handled by the court. Of that number, 327 were adjudicated; 182 were probation violations, 35 cases were transferred to the county the offender lives in, and 54 petitions were dismissed. Also, 75 of the charged offenses were dismissed or pleaded down to other lesser charges.

A breakdown of the adjudicated offenses includes:

- * 35 retail fraud offenses,
- * 31 instances each of drug offenses and assaults,
- * 30 alcohol offenses,
- * 23 malicious destruction of property complaints,
- * 22 offenses each of domestic violence and breaking and entering, and
- * 18 traffic violations.

Most of the kids in trouble, 64 percent, were males. That's down from 68 percent in 2004.

The rate of new charges filed has dropped by half since 1998, when 992 were filed. In 2005, 491 new charges were filed.

The court also saw 59 children who were involved in child protection cases -- cases filed for neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Those children came from 30 different families. That number is down from 100 children in 2004.

"We are fortunate to have a community here in Midland that supports the initiatives that make these reductions possible," Probate Judge Dorene S. Allen stated in a media release.

Lansing State Journal

Letters

March 8, 2006

Incident was 'minor'

The uproar over the minor incident at Highfields Inc. - now further fueled by a grandstanding judge - overlooks the tremendous record of serving Michigan youths and their families. There is no doubt that a rule was broken in the incident, but it does well to remember there is no record of broken bones or perhaps even bruises.

Please look at the overall record of achievement before trashing a program that has restored thousands of wayward - or better yet, challenged - young men and headed them in a more successful direction.

Place the incidents in perspective. These youths are at Camp Highfields for a reason.

Restructuring their lives is not an easy task. Calls for firing the top administrators or selling the camp only make the job more difficult.

Pat McCarthy
Lansing

Hazards ignored

Highfields Inc. is just the tip of the iceberg with the children whose oversight is administered by the Michigan Department of Human Services. We at the Foundation for Children's Rights can show you cases of DHS ignoring molestation and other horror stories in foster care situations. Standard operating procedure is to sweep it under the rug; the media won't touch it until a Ricky Holland ends up dead.

One of our families in the Detroit area, when it tried to get media to cover the abuse of their children in Children's Protective Services care a few years ago was told, "If your kid isn't dead, we aren't interested." In other words, if it isn't sensational, the media just help DHS cover up its dark side.

Legislators on the House and Senate Family and Children's subcommittee know, but do nothing.

Nancy Luckhurst
Sheridan

First Nokomis Graduation

When a child is born, one of the first things he learns is how to crawl. Then he takes his first steps in learning how to walk. He may stumble along the way, but with help and support in achieving his dreams, someday he will learn how to fly.

So it is with so many of the boys who walk through the doors of Nokomis Challenge Center, an educational treatment facility at Houghton Lake. If they take to heart what they have learned and turn away from negative behavior, the sky is the limit. Eighteen-year-old Joseph Friguglietti is one such young man.

Having gone AWOL from Nokomis last year, Friguglietti was living with his girlfriend at the time in Saginaw.

"She said I should follow my dream," he said, of being a fire fighter. "And so I turned myself in."

Friguglietti is the first Nokomis youth in the facility's history to have graduated with a diploma. Dressed in a black cap and gown, he participated in a graduation ceremony Friday before his mother, Nancy Lubanski, his cousin, Stefanie Redmond, and his friend, Veronica Cuellar, as well as staff and fellow residents of Nokomis.

"This is a very important day for me," he said in his graduation speech. "I had trouble complying with the rules." He said he had struggled through the program before going AWOL, then had to re-start. In the process, he learned he could not run away from his problems.

"You're gonna have to deal with them like a man," he said.

Friguglietti presented letters to individual staff members thanking them for their help, and thanked his family and friends for attending. He also presented teacher Paull Fry with a framed letter.

"Congratulations," Fry said. "Way to go, man."

Friguglietti's mother said the Nokomis staff "helped my family a great deal. He's grown into a man...I can tell how much he's grown into the person that he is."

Friguglietti was able to graduate not only with the support of his family—his father, Peter Friguglietti, was not able to attend—but with the help of the Nokomis staff. And he gave a lot of the credit to Fry.

"He cares," Friguglietti said. "He's like a father to me. He don't beat around the bush. Everything he tells me—it's the right thing."

He said when he came back to Nokomis, it was easier than his first experience because he knew the program. This time, however, his efforts were fruitful.

Friguglietti's final academic challenge was to write a research paper a minimum of eight pages long. Having helped build a Habitat for Humanity house last year, he decided to make that his focus. He interviewed Executive Director Debbie Banks and Habitat homeowner Arleen Hosinski and ended up writing 18 pages.

His report and a collection of Habitat photos, some featuring him working in his orange Nokomis jumpsuit, were on display for visitors to review.

"It is outstanding," Fry said. "We're very proud of Joe and the work that he did."

Friguglietti said his favorite part of working with the Habitat crew was learning about roofing.

What was the difference between his first Nokomis experience and his last?

"I was faking the program," he said. "When I first got here I didn't care about nobody. Once I started helping, I felt better."

Originally from the Detroit area, Friguglietti had behavioral problems, Lubanski said, when he lived downstate. He was hanging with the wrong crowd. She said she could have bailed him out of trouble. But instead she helped turn him in a certain direction.

"He needed to learn a lesson," Lubanski said, by attending Nokomis, "and he's learned the right lesson."

Having already been at the Pioneer Work and Learn facility in Vassar, she said, her son did not want to be told what to do. But, she said, he was still respectful.

"He's got a good heart," she said.

Friguglietti was able to attain his diploma from Nokomis through a partnership with the Mackinaw Academy, a public school in Macomb County.

Friguglietti will soon be pursuing his dream of being a firefighter and will attend Macomb Community College in May. He will start in the summer term, taking EMT and fire maintenance classes, with the hopes of completing a two-year associate degree.

In Friguglietti's commencement program were the words of a Pink Floyd song Fry had printed, "Learning to Fly." It says, in part, "A fatal attraction holding me fast/How can I escape this irresistible grasp?/No navigator to guide my way home/Unladen, empty and turned to stone/I'm a soul in tension that's learning to fly/condition grounded but determined to try."

Child Support Official Grilled

The head of the state's Office of Child Support Services was grilled this morning by Republican members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services over the lack of action on the part of the administration to collect an estimated \$9 billion in past due child support.

"It seems to me we have to make a concerted effort even if we're just to take a piece of that ... and send it to a private collection agency and see what results we get," said Rep. Jerry **KOOIMAN** (R-Grand Rapids).

Marilyn **STEPHAN**, director of the Department of Human Services' Office of Child Support Services, told Kooiman that the state's child support collection efforts are a coordinated partnership with local courts and Friend of the Court offices.

"I can continue to encourage all parties to meet and develop a pilot and I will certainly do that," Stephan said of developing a pilot project using a private contractor to collect past-due child support payments. However, she argued that the state alone couldn't resolve the problem.

She also told lawmakers that there is a 10-year statute of limitations on what can be collected. However, that statute of limitations isn't taken into consideration when calculating the \$9 billion figure. In addition, the statute of limitations can only take past due amounts off the rolls after a defendant uses that as a legal defense.

Of the \$9 billion figure the state uses, Stephan said some \$4.5 billion is owed directly to the state. The problem however, is that it's unclear how much of that money is even collectible. Stephan noted that the past due figure includes amounts that date back some 18 years or more.

Rep. Roger **KAHN** (R-Saginaw Twp.) asked Stephan why the state even uses the number to begin with.

"Do you find that a useful number to quote to us?" asked Kahn.

"It is the number that is accurate according to what the arrears are in Michigan," Stephan replied. "If you're asking if I think that all is collectible, the answer is no."

Kahn then asked why the department doesn't just use the number that is collectible under the statute of limitations, something Stephan said would be a good idea, but she said since she's been in the job over the last three years the focus has been on the state's computerized child support enforcement system.

Rep. Bruce **CASWELL** (R-Hillsdale) argued that it's much like the old barn door and horse analogy. The state isn't taking action until the child support hasn't been paid.

“There doesn't seem to be an aggressive attitude on the part of the department to go after these back cases,” Caswell said. “I struggle with the reluctance on the part of the department to be aggressive with every tool available, rather than throwing out a pilot now and then?”

To make his point—Stephan and DHS could act—Kooiman wound up citing existing laws he argue authorizes the state to take whatever action necessary to collect on child support that is more than 12 months past due.

“Why haven't we taken the actions available?” a clearly frustrated Kooiman asked. “What more do we have to give you in terms of authority, other than to mandate you do that? It [statute] pretty clearly states that you have that authority.”

Stephan then said that her office doesn't directly establish and enter into court orders.

“We enter into contracts with our Friend of the Court offices,” she said. “Prosecutors establish cases ... we all work cooperatively.”

Kooiman shot back that the statute he was reading, “says your office may centralize enforcement activities. Then your office may contract with private collection agencies. My question is, why haven't you done that.”

The Grand Rapids lawmaker went on to argue that Stephan even admitted she doesn't have information about the experience of other states that have used private contractors.

“That tells me you haven't done due diligence,” Kooiman said to Stephan. “That's more [money] than the entire DHS budget and that's a fairly large budget.”

In other news, Stephan informed the committee that beginning in 2008, the Federal Budget Reduction Act would slice 23 percent of the state's child support collection dollars, or \$58 million. According to the federal government's own estimates, that means the state will be collecting \$300 million less in child support over five years. Over ten years, the cut will mean \$1.2 billion in uncollected child support dollars.

“We [DHS] think it will be higher than that,” Stephan told the panel.

Livingston Briefs
Detroit News
March 8, 2006

Howell

\$30,000 is allocated for day care program

The Livingston County Board of Commissioners agreed to allocate \$30,000 to an adult day care program offered by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B and operated by Livingston County Social Services. The Be Our Guest facility provided 7,297 hours of service to 31 residents. The goal in 2006 is to provide 13,500 hours, the Catholic agency reported.

March 8, 2006

Low-income families may get phone help

FROM RECORD EAGLE STAFF REPORTS

TRAVERSE CITY - More residents are eligible for discounts on their local land-line telephone service through expansion of the state's Lifeline program, officials from the Michigan Public Service Commission said.

To qualify for the program a customer's household income must be at or below 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines or participate in assistance programs including Medicaid, food stamps, supplemental security income, federal housing assistance, the state's home-energy assistance program or the national school lunch program.

Eligible customers can apply for Lifeline through their local telephone provider. The MPSC can also provide more information at (800) 292-9555.

Job fairs planned for March

The Huron Daily Tribune

03/07/2006

It's not too late for employers to sign up for the "Who's Hiring Week" Job Fair sponsored by Thumb Area Michigan Works! and Select Staffing.

The Job Fairs will be conducted March 13 at the Franklin Inn in Bad Axe; Tuesday, March 14, at Countryside Free Methodist Church in Sandusky; Wednesday, March 15, at the Polish American Club in Caro and Thursday, March 17, at American Legion Post #16 in Lapeer. Job Fair hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at all locations.

There is no charge for employers to participate in the Job Fair and there is no limit to the number of Job Fair locations an employer can utilize. Employers are invited to call Jody at Thumb Area Michigan Works! at (989) 635-3561, ext. 226 for more information, or to reserve a space.

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Federal tax credits not claimed

Tuesday, March 07, 2006

By Steven Harmon
The Grand Rapids Press

ROCKFORD -- It's money many low-income people leave on the table, and two Republican lawmakers with economically troubled districts are determined to get the funds into taxpayers' hands.

With a little more than a month left to go in the tax season, Reps. Tom Pearce and Judy Emmons are trying to connect West Michigan's low- and moderate-income families with millions of dollars in unclaimed federal tax credits.

What most eligible taxpayers don't know is that they can get their taxes prepared for free. For Emmons, a Sheridan Republican whose district includes Montcalm County, the issue was made more real when the doors to the Greenville Electrolux plant shut for good last week, throwing 1,100 more people out of work. In total, 2,700 Electrolux workers have lost their jobs. "It is news to many people that refunds are available, and with the issues facing the residents of Montcalm County, every dollar matters," Emmons said Monday. "The average refund is \$1,600. There are a lot of people who could put that kind of money to good use -- for groceries, utilities or mortgage payments -- and, at the same time, it will add a boost to our economy."

More than 200,000 Michigan residents failed to claim \$214 million in the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit in 2003; in Kent County alone, more than \$11 million was left unclaimed that year.

Often, residents believe they don't owe taxes so don't bother to file; or they file EZ forms, which does not include the earned income credit, said Pearce, whose district includes the North Kent Services Center, where he was once director. The agency served more than 12,000 struggling families last year.

The earned income tax credit could make a difference for thousands, Pearce said.

People who think they may be eligible can contact the Kent County Tax Credit Coalition, which has 16 West Michigan sites where residents can get free tax preparation services.

Minimum-wage war flares

Analysts say increase would hurt economy in end

By ANGELA MULLINS
Port HuronTimes Herald

As a coalition working to increase Michigan's minimum wage moves toward getting its issue on the November ballot, economists and business officials are red-flagging the effort. Increasing the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.85 an hour, they said, would have the opposite effect of what supporters of the move intend - to create more job options and offer workers more opportunities.

Instead, it would hurt lower-wage earners because small businesses would be forced either to hire fewer people or those with more experience. Entry-level workers would have fewer opportunities, analysts said.

On top of that, prices would go up, so anyone making more than minimum wage would pay more without any salary boost, experts said.

Some locals workers believe the proposed boost is needed.

"Rather than working several jobs at a lower wage, I may be able to work one job that pays a better rate," said Ryan Haskill, 32, of Greenwood Township who has two minimum-wage jobs. "I don't see anything negative about that."

Chris Bachelder, spokesman at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, a conservative think tank, said years of studies about the issue speak for themselves.

"It's pretty clear ... there will be a lowering of employment in general related to an increase in the minimum wage," Bachelder said. "That (lowered employment) is concentrated in the poor and the young and the unskilled."

The critics

Key to the argument against increasing the minimum wage is that government action should not be the driving force of economic change. Analysts said legislated increases in wage rates takes control of the labor market out of the hands of businesses and causes unnatural changes in the labor market.

That causes increased labor costs to be passed along to all consumers and leads to businesses cutting previously staffed jobs, said Paul Bukowski, director of political affairs for the Small Business Association of Michigan.

In the end, that leads to higher unemployment that often affects younger workers the most, critics said.

According to 2004 statistics from the federal Department of Labor, 52% of the nation's nearly 74 million untipped minimum-wage workers are 16 to 24.

In Michigan, about 90,000 workers are paid at or below \$5.15 an hour. Age breakdowns were not available.

"Ultimately, businesses are faced with two decisions - don't hire anyone new and keep prices the same, or hire people at the new rate you didn't plan on and raise your prices," Bukowski said. "It is an artificial raise in (business) cost ... when the market forces aren't dictating that they need to do that."

Patrick McNiff, shift supervisor at Coney Island in downtown Port Huron, sees the logic. Although he'd like to see his workers move up a few notches on the pay scale, McNiff said the ultimate impact of a minimum-wage increase can't be disputed.

The restaurant's 10 employees generally start at \$6 an hour - 85 cents more than the mandated rate. However, the proposed rate still would force an increase on the payroll.

"I know it would affect us. Me saying it wouldn't would be a lie," McNiff said.

"Eventually, we have to just go on dollars per man-hours alone."

Admon Astifan, general manager of Rum & Whiskey Runnerz restaurant in Port Huron, said wage rates need to be determined by skill.

Small businesses, Astifan said, can't afford to pay wait staff high rates unless individual employees are experienced enough to market menu items that bring in money, such as expensive wines.

"Even if you pay them \$10 (an hour) they could make it back for the business and give the people more of an experience," Astifan said. "But it is very, very hard to find experienced people all around in the restaurant business."

The supporters

Still, proponents of the idea said there can be nothing wrong with giving Michigan workers the pay they deserve.

It's up to businesses, they said, to make sound decisions about employees.

"It boils down to if you can't buy a gallon of gas for your car ... or you can't buy a gallon of milk, where's the encouragement to work?" said Ted Frantz, president of the St. Clair County AFL-CIO and a supporter of the minimum-wage campaign. "If (businesses) keep their employees in mind, they're going to want that living wage for them."

Contact Angela Mullins at (810) 989-6270 or amullins@gannett.com.

Originally published March 8, 2006

A sister to lean on

Conference in Livonia focuses on women as professional mentors

March 8, 2006

BY MARGARITA BAUZA

Detroit Free Press

Jennifer Kluge knows that every time she's honored for her work there is a long line of people who share the credit.

There is her dad, who patiently explained everything she ever needed to know about business. And there are the two female executives at a Chicago advertising firm where she worked in the mid-1990s. In addition to her dad, they were her main professional mentors.

"They showed me that if you work hard, it doesn't matter what you look like as long as you get results and if you're professional and ethical about getting results," says Kluge, executive vice president of the Michigan Business and Professional Association.

Women's failure to mentor other women in the workplace is a hurdle to their success, say the organizers of the 10th Annual Women and Leadership in the Workplace Conference and Awards Luncheon. Helping women develop mentor relationships is a key topic at this year's event being held today at the Burton Manor Banquet & Conference Center in Livonia. Kluge's organization sponsors it.

"Our advisory board felt strongly that one of the weaknesses of women in the workplace is that women don't pull other women up," Kluge says.

The workshop also points out the need for more women mentors.

Mentoring among women is a subject of much discussion among leaders, as evidence shows that women mentor less often than men do; that negatively affects women's opportunities for advancement.

Mentoring, Kluge says, can be instrumental to a person's career. It can take place in many forms and be done by many people -- family members, colleagues, supervisors and community leaders.

A mentor relationship can be formal or informal. Some people are mentors just because of who they are and how they are looked upon as role models. Other mentorships are more formal, consisting of weekly and monthly meetings.

Although one of the workshops at the conference is to focus on developing woman-to-woman mentor relationships, Kluge says it's important for women to have men and women mentors.

"These are people that you respect for their work ethic, integrity and their ability to get a job done well," she says. "Our goal one day is to not notice whether or not you are doing business with a man or a woman, but with the person who's best for the project. A goal for our Women and Leadership in the Workplace Conference is to not have a need to have the conference at all."

Why numbers are low

In Michigan, which has among the lowest number of female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies in the country (a number that has fallen during the last two years), the subject of mentoring is particularly relevant.

The 2005 Michigan Women's Leadership Index, commissioned by Inforum, formerly the Women's Economic Club, shows there are no women in the top five highest-compensated executive positions at any of Michigan's 20 Fortune 500 companies.

The report also showed that in all 100 Fortune 500 companies in the state, there were 27 female executives in 2005, down from 30 in 2003.

In addition, a 2003 online poll of 1,000 professional women conducted by CareerWomen.com shows that 64% of women reported that their most important mentors were men, compared to 36% who reported their most influential mentors were women.

The poll suggests that the higher proportion of male executives accounts for the higher number of mentors.

But some experts argue that women are less inclined than men to become mentors. Competition for the few positions at the top accounts for their resistance to pull others along with them, according to the book "I Can't Believe She Did That!: Why Women Betray Other Women at Work," by Nan Mooney (\$23.95, St. Martin's Press).

Another explanation: Women are so busy balancing work and home life that mentoring falls by the wayside.

Entrepreneur grows as mentor

Sherry Washington, owner of the Sherry Washington Gallery in Detroit and one of six women to be honored at today's conference, blames time and the inability of people to see the rewards of mentoring as the main culprits in the problem.

Mentoring, however, is something she feels women can't afford not to do.

She mentors high school students at her art gallery, exposing them to professional situations and people in powerful positions.

"When I mentor, you help my career, too, because my power grows through you. You are more powerful as you help other people," she says. "Power is dormant if it doesn't have a life.

"You owe it to society to give money, time, something. You might not get it back, but you have to put something in the universe for the world to be better. If not, what's your legacy?"

Washington has a vast number of mentors so far -- a powerful collection of men, women, friends and colleagues. She credits her dad, William Taft Washington, for instilling in her the business acumen she needed to have a successful business.

Her mother taught her patience and persistence. Her siblings helped her believe that she, too, could go to college. Then-Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, who hired her at 20 to run the Tireman Street campaign office in 1977, taught her lessons in politics that she still practices today. He taught her how the political process works, something that has come in handy in her work as a business owner, she says.

Her friend and businesswoman Carmen Smith Poindexter has given her biweekly lectures for 22 years on the importance of time management and paying attention to whom you spend your time with, she says.

The two have met informally for years. Poindexter is an esthetician who has a business in Windsor.

"She's pushed me to be a gutsy thinker, to take chances -- daily."

Marianne Udow, director of the state Department of Health and Human Services and another honoree, also names her parents as her first and most powerful mentors.

"My mother showed me how to be an engaged and professional woman on social issues and to take risks, to go out for what I believe and really stand for something."

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who appointed her to her current position, and Granholm's husband, first gentleman Dan Mulhern, taught her most of what she knows about leadership.

That's why she believes women need to take part in boards and in women's business clubs and share professionally in as many ways as possible.

She says the reason women don't mentor more often is a matter of time.

"In some cases, women are so busy in terms of balancing family and work, they think mentoring is an extra frill that they don't have time for.

The rewards, she says, are always far greater than the sacrifices.

"It's so gratifying to share what you've learned along the way and to see someone you're mentoring to grab a hold of something and run with it."

Contact **MARGARITA BAUZA** at 313-222-6823 or mbauza@freepress.com.

- **Why have a mentor?** One of the best ways to advance your career is to find someone who can coach you, help you meet the right people and find good information.

How do you get a mentor?

If you are young and up and coming, set up meetings, a lunch or coffee with someone you admire and who you think can help you. Tell them about yourself and listen to them talk about themselves. Communicate your desire to learn. If there is chemistry, that person will take you under her wing.

There are two different types of mentors: There are people who purposely try to bring people up with them, and there are people who do excellent jobs and who people look up to. These people might be mentors without being aware of it.

Informal vs. formal: If someone likes you and is in a more senior position, there will be a natural progression in mentoring. That's an advantage of informal mentoring over formal company programs. Don't ask a person if he or she can mentor you. It puts the mentor on the spot and the relationship might feel forced. Let it develop naturally. If it doesn't take, keep looking.

Margarita Bauza

Source: Monster.com and Jennifer Kluge, vice president of the Michigan Business and Professional Association.

Women & Leadership in the Workplace 2006 Honorees

The Michigan Business and Professional Association chose the following women for their individual success and their leadership in the community.

Gail Torreano, Michigan president, AT&T

Marianne Udow, director, Michigan Department of Human Services

Carmen Harlan, anchor, WDIV-TV, Channel 4

Anne Stevens, executive vice president, Ford Motor Company

Sherry Washington, owner, Sherry Washington
Gallery

Rosa Parks, late civil rights leader